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Protecting Michigan's Water--It's not a game!

Michigan's most precious natural resource is too important to become a pawn in a political game.

From the beginning of this legislative session, we have advocated legislation to improve the protection of Michigan's groundwater resources. Unfortunately, the governor is not using her powers effectively to protect diversion of our waters.

We proposed a sweeping upgrade of our water laws and created a system to pinpoint and protect certain critical groundwater resources.

Soon after we learned there was an incredible lack of information regarding our groundwater and devised a plan, under legislation signed by the governor last year, to give us scientific answers to protect our waters. A groundwater advisory council was created to help with this study.

We were well on our way to identifying the necessary scientific data, until the governor, looking for political cover from angry environmental groups because of her intervention in the Ice Mountain water bottling controversy, appointed a second group that mirrors the already existing council. She charged essentially the same body of experts with a focus of looking at one piece of legislation that may in fact turn out to be too weak.

That's the problem with the governor's approach. It's impossible to create worthwhile water protection regulations without all the facts. If the methods of completing tasks continually change, the tasks will never be completed. It may be good politics for the governor, but it is bad policy for Michigan.

We supported water protection by advocating for expansion of available information on our groundwater system. We expected the governor to honor her pledge when she signed our plan. We question why what made sense and was based on sound science in August 2003, now no longer meets her approval. We also question why there is such an urgency to implement new water diversion policies when federal law gives each state governor a unilateral veto over any proposed diversion. Governor Engler exercised this veto authority in the past and it remains the single most important authority Michigan has to protect our Great Lakes.

Additionally, we must strive for the proper blend of environmental protection while maintaining the availability of water for use by all Michigan citizens, including the agricultural community and other job providers. Second, legal experts have argued that legislating the governor's proposal would make it more likely for future diversions. Obviously, this is a serious issue that merits careful study.

There are many issues that are subject to politics in Lansing, but gambling with the protection of our water is a game no one should play.

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